

STAT

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-21WASHINGTON POST
20 MARCH 1983

Bulgaria Suspected of Smuggling In Italy to Finance Terrorism

By Sari Gilbert

Special to The Washington Post

ROME—Bulgarian citizens have been heavily implicated here in arms, drug and cigarette smuggling, according to several judicial and police investigators. High-level officials suggest that the East Bloc state may use the proceeds from smuggling to finance spying or terrorist activities.

Bulgarian officials already have been accused of having a role in the May 1981 attempt to kill the pope, and judicial investigators are studying a possible Bulgarian attempt at involvement in the Red Brigades kidnapping of U.S. Brig. Gen. James L. Dozier in late 1981. Several Bulgarians also are under investigation for possible involvement in an alleged plot to kill Polish union leader Lech Walesa. All of the charges have been strongly denied by Bulgaria.

The sum of the information obtained in the various investigations of the Bulgarian government's role in alleged criminal activities suggests at least that Bulgaria has had little regard for Italian laws in its desire to earn hard currency, in the view of observers here.

More seriously, some observers see a pattern of behavior suggesting that Bulgaria may have re-

placed Czechoslovakia as the East Bloc country most eager to support terrorist activities here as a means of destabilizing this faithful NATO country. In this view, Bulgaria is serving as the Kremlin's henchman by planning assassinations or other covert operations.

There have been no new major developments in the probe into the attempt to kill Pope John Paul II since the arrest last November of a Bulgarian airlines official on charges of active complicity in the case and the later implication of two former Bulgarian Embassy officials in the attack. But the activities of the magistrates involved in the papal probe and the other investigations involving Bulgaria suggest that the various cases may be related.

Rome magistrates Ferdinando Imposimato and Domenico Sica, who are assigned to the case related to the Dozier kidnapping, and Judge Carlo Palermo, who heads an investigation into a major arms and drug smuggling ring, have interrogated convicted papal assailant Mehmet Ali Agca in prison. The three Bulgarian officials were implicated in the papal shooting primarily by Agca's testimony, officials say.

Palermo returned Thursday from an 11-day

visit to Sofia, where he interrogated Bekir Celenk, a Turkish businessman who has been implicated both in smuggling and in the papal attack. He reportedly arranged to offer Agca 3 million West German marks to kill John Paul.

Palermo, a magistrate in Trento, is responsible for the investigation of a giant arms and narcotics ring. According to his probe, major decisions by a gang of Italians, Turks and Middle Easterners were made at regular meetings in Bulgaria.

The court documents in that case state that Bulgaria is a narcotics producer as well as a key country of transit for the smuggling. They also say that shipments of arms have been rerouted from Bulgaria to insurrectionist groups in various countries.

A recent report by the customs police on cigarette smuggling cites Bulgaria—followed by Romania—as the principal culprit among East Bloc countries in tobacco smuggling that has been going on for at least a decade.

Late last year the customs police filed a suit in Trieste against the officials of a Bulgarian state trading company, Despred, for its alleged involvement in what was termed a "continuous influx" of smuggled cigarettes from the Bulgarian ports of Burgas and Varna and from the Pioner and Sofia train stations.

Socialist Finance Minister Francesco Forte, who last month sent an official note of protest to the Italian Foreign Ministry over the issue, said that the evidence accumulated so far reveals "a direct responsibility" on the part of the Bulgarian government that he described as "intolerable."

"Given the tight control of the Bulgarian government over the country's state enterprises, it is clear that the government itself must be involved," Forte told The Washington Post.

Another inquiry, involving alleged espionage and terrorist activities by a jailed Italian trade unionist, Luigi Scricciolo, is continuing into Scricciolo's reported contacts with Bulgarian officials.

The Italian press has reported that one of the accusations against Scricciolo, former head of the international relations department of the center-left Union of Italian Labor, was that he sought to arrange a meeting between Red Brigades terrorists holding kidnapped Gen. Dozier and one or more Bulgarian Embassy officials.